

## Paul's Advice

*Corinthians Explained*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 7:17-40  
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Congregation, the main text for this morning is from 1 Corinthians 7, the verses 29 and 30. 1 Corinthians 7:29-30,

29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; 30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; 31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

So far.

Congregation, there's a short version and a longer version of the points for today. We just mention the first one, the shorter one: Paul's advice. In the first place, who is he advising; secondly, what is he advising; and in the third place, why is he advising? Shorter version. Now the longer version. The Apostle Paul's advice to them that were called, to stay where they are because the time is short. You see, that's the same. Paul's advice, in the first place, who is he advising, mainly the called by God; secondly, what is he advising, to remain where you are, I hope to explain that; and in the third place, why is he advising them, because the time is short.

Congregation, may we begin with an example for the children. Suppose someone is on his deathbed and it won't take long anymore, a few days. You are standing next to that bed and the person dying says, "I would like to buy a house." You say, "What? You'd like to buy a house? You know, that doesn't make any sense." No. So what are you advising? You're advising that this sick man, he's so sick, you are advising this man to just let go because the time is short. There are better things to do, right, than buying a house on your deathbed. And that's something like what the Apostle Paul is doing here, the time is short, we are all on our deathbed and he says, "What are you doing? What are you doing? Have you been called out of the darkness to the light and you're so worried about things that need to change? Just let go and remember the time is short."

So that's kind of the context of this chapter and then it's remarkable that the Apostle Paul indeed talks about them that were called. Were called. Let me show you, 17, "But as God

hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." The Apostle Paul is talking about the calling, God's calling. You have been called by God. What does that mean, called? Well, I can call my children and I just mention her name and say, "Come." But you know, the child can obey or disobey, that's just the common work of calling. We also use it for a telephone call, right? And someone can pick up the phone or not. So sometimes with calling the Bible does not mean anything else than just call someone, "Hey, So-and-so." But sometimes the calling means a vocation, the calling to become a teacher, you feel the calling to be an engineer, you feel the calling to be a counselor. You feel that calling somehow and maybe also in a religious sense, the Apostle Paul has been called by God to be an apostle. But sometimes that calling is God's calling, right? God's calling, "My son, my daughter, give me your heart." So there is God's call, the call of the gospel, the call of the Bible, the call of the message to repent and to seek salvation and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the calling that comes from the Lord, he calls, doesn't he? Doesn't he call you? But sometimes the calling does not mean only the calling of the word that comes to the ear, sometimes the calling in the Bible also in this chapter means that calling that is so powerful, so irresistible that it goes into your heart, and the Lord calls you and draws you with that calling that only the Lord can call you with. That's not the calling you can ignore. You can't ignore it anymore, there's such a sweetness in there, such a power in there. It's so convincing so your understanding is enlightened and you are made willing. That's God's calling.

Let me show you from the Bible. In the first place, let us see it in verse 17, "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. Is any man called being circumcised?" Is someone converted, being circumcised, called? I read in 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." You see, there is that calling of the Lord. He calls out of the darkness. He takes your hand and he takes your heart and he draws you out of the darkness of sin and the world and your own lost state and he brings to that eternal life.

You know, in the Bible the word "calling" is used both ways. We also see that in the Canons of Dort, if I may show you on page 107 to see both. In the first place, I read Article 9 on page 107. "It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ, offered therein, nor of God, who calls men," he calls men, "by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the word, refuse to come, and be converted." So when the Lord calls, people can refuse. But then on the next page, for example, in Article 11, "But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illumines their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man."

So what happens when the Lord calls you in that intense way? The Lord takes your heart, he takes that stony heart out, it's your heart of flesh, and you are a different person. You have a different focal point. Eternity is weighing. You begin to realize that this life without God is so meaningless, so empty, and you are drawn to the word and the word of God becomes your book. You begin to read it and to study it, and to listen to it, and to love it because he calls, he calls you and he disconnects you in a certain way from your sins and you begin to hate sin, you don't want to sin anymore. You yet do sin, you are disappointed about that but yet the Lord calls you and he calls you again and you experience the power of it. It is the power of God unto salvation.

The Apostle Paul also writes in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians about that, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." You were. Yes, you were called, "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

So the Apostle Paul is advising, advising who? He's advising those people that were called. He's advising God's people that are called out of sin and darkness in the world and have been made pilgrims. He advises God's people. But you know, it is also quite serious to hear the calling and to not answer it, "And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not." So you all hear the gospel call and if you don't answer that, it's on your account.

But the Lord works in such a way that you are made willing and you cannot resist anymore. That's the power of God, and when that happens, there is love and also zeal. Let's talk about zeal. Zeal, kind of an excitement, something new, something radical. Do you know what radical means? Radical means having to do with the roots. So it's very fundamental and it's a complete change of heart and there is that zeal and you say, "I cannot do that anymore. I'm not going along anymore. I can't use that anymore. I can't sing it anymore. I can't see it anymore. I can't hear it anymore." And you say, "That's enough," and there's that choice. And sometimes you fall back and you choose again and you make mistakes and you struggle with it but yet a choice is worked in the heart.

And congregation, that zeal sometimes goes too far. You know, think of someone, a pagan man in Corinth, he heard the Apostle Paul speak, he was deeply convinced of his sins, he came home and said, "That needs to go and that needs to go," and he looked at his wife and said, "You know, we're not on the same page anymore. Should you not leave? I think I'm leaving. This is such an ungodly marriage and there's so many things wrong and we can't agree on those things anymore. You're leaving or I'm leaving." The Apostle Paul says, "No, remain where you are if possible." And you know, I see that man that was converted, that pagan man, and he went to work and he said to his boss, "You are not my boss anymore because I have another Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm not going to listen to you anymore." Do you know what he says to his girls? "You know, I was planning to marry you out to that man from town and I can't do it anymore. You have to stay unmarried for a while." Do you see, that's the second part of chapter 1, Corinthians 7. The Apostle Paul is advising them that are called, "Just calm down."

This brings us to the second thought. So in the first place, the Apostle Paul addresses the problem of circumcision. You know, that pagan man that was converted said, "You know, now I need to be circumcised because you need to be circumcised in order to be a really Jewish Christian." He was mixed up but he said, "I need to be circumcised." The Apostle Paul says, "You were called uncircumcised so you stay uncircumcised." And some others said, "You know, I was circumcised when I was young. I'd like to undo that because it's not so important at all." So somehow he wanted to change it around and to make himself uncircumcised again. The Apostle Paul says, "Whatever." The Apostle Paul says, "Circumcision is nothing. Circumcision is not that important. Whether you are circumcised or not circumcised, there are more important things, aren't there?"

Verse 18, "Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised." Then the bold words in 19, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing." Do you know what's important? Look at verse 19, "but the keeping of the commandments of God." That's important. You know, you can lay awake about many things and maybe there are good points and maybe you should be circumcised or not circumcised, the Apostle Paul says, "If that's your identity, being circumcised or not, you make a big mistake. It's not that important. So let go. You were circumcised, okay, you were circumcised. You weren't so you weren't. But the keeping of the commandments of God, the love of the Bible, the call to follow, the call to repent, the call to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his ways, that narrow pathway into eternal light, that's important. Those outer things, be careful. Some outer things are important but sometimes we just say to that, no."

So what are you busy with? This or that or maybe some outer things and maybe important things but what really counts is the keeping of the commandments of God being a result of a new heart, and walking in the ways of the Lord. And then it is all the same theme, this is all about calm down, stay where you are, don't change so quickly. Now of course, of course, they had to leave certain things and to disconnect from certain things but not from everything.

And then the Apostle Paul speaks about slavery, about being a servant. "Art thou called being a servant? care not for it." Whatever, that's not important. A servant, "Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free," sure, "use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide," do you see that, "abide with God." Now slavery in the time of the New Testament was not the same as slavery in the United States and Canada. He has nothing to erase and the slaves, the servants in Israel and in Athens and in Philippi and Corinth, those servants were making a good salary, and they sometimes had servants themselves, and some were very educated and very valuable people in society, but yet they were officially servants and some were freemen.

So the Apostle Paul doesn't say that's all fine, he says, you know, if you can be free, use it. Use it. But he is not in favor of a revolution. He's not in favor of making chaos of society. He says, "You know, seek opportunity to be free but keep in mind there is something else, are you a servant of God? Are you a servant of Christ? For he that is called, called, for he that is called in the Lord being a servant is the Lord's freeman." So you're his servant and you have a Master but, you know, if you have been called by the Lord with that special saving calling, you are a freeman. And, "likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."

So the Apostle Paul uses the theology to explain practical things and he says it's kind of minor if you're a servant or not. It's minor if you are in that special kind, type of slavery or not. It's kind of minor, not so important, and so the Apostle Paul also talks of marriage in verse 25, "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." So he's saying, "I can't find anything out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus about this issue. I have no commandment of the Lord. The Lord Jesus didn't talk about that. Yet I give my judgment." Oh, Apostle Paul, that's your personal thought in the Bible? "No, no, no. Yet I give my judgment, as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." So he's saying, "I am sure about this. The Lord in his mercy has given me insight and light and I convey this as the word of God. Although there is not a specific command of the Lord Jesus, yet by God's mercy I dare to say this."

And, "I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife." We talked about that last Sunday, didn't we? So if you don't have to marry, don't marry. If you have to marry, marry. But do you see the point? Stay where you are. Are you bound to a wife? Because some of those pagans were converted and they said, "You know, I'm leaving my wife, I will leave my husband. It doesn't work anymore. Two faiths on one pillow, it doesn't work. There's always tension, always disagreement. I can't handle that." The Apostle Paul says, "Stay where you are if possible." There can be so much zeal but you can also overdo it.

And then I skip a few verses and we'll come back in the third point and look at the last part of this chapter, it's the same theme, the same theme of remaining unmarried, for example. Verse 32, "But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife." It's about being single. It's completely fine to be single. It has even advantages because then you have so much more time on your hands to please God, to walk in his ways, to use your time and to use your energy in the things that are most important of the kingdom of God.

"He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord." And you can fill that in different ways but, you know, young people, you're single and your mother is saying when, and your friends say when, and your brothers say it's time you get married. Don't listen. You don't have to. You don't have to. It might be better not to.

"But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife." Do you see that? So when you marry yet, and that's fine, but you have to think that's not always easy either, and you may be extra busy and have less time for the things of God and of the kingdom of God.

"There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." And then the Apostle Paul talks about fathers marrying off their children, the second to the last part of this chapter and he writes in verse 38, "So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better." This is by the way of problem in that piece, some say this is about parents and their girls, and others say, no, this is about betrothing people, so someone is engaged and that's the issue. I don't think so but it's a hard piece.

And then 39 and 40, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide," fourth time, abide, "abide after my judgment: and I think," I am convinced he means, "also that I have the Spirit of God." So widows, widowers, don't marry. If you want to, go ahead but she is happier if she so abides.

So the apostle advises to them that are called, called in a saving way, and he advises them to calm down and to see things in a different light, and not so much zeal and break things apart, but just follow the Lord and take your time and think it through because the time is short, third point. Paul's advice to whom, what about, why? The advice is to them that are called. He advises them to remain mainly, not remaining in sin, not remaining in sinful relationships, not remaining in the business that is not ethical, not remaining in anything that is sinful but for the rest, remain, be calm, follow the Lord because the time is short.

Verse 29, the time is short. That's crucial in this chapter. What time? The time of your life is short and the time that is still remaining until the Second Coming of Christ is short? It won't take long and we die. It won't take long and the Lord Jesus is returning. There was a feeling also in the time of the Lord Jesus after the Lord Jesus died, the feeling that he would come back quickly, and so all the generations after have to count on that. It might be this century. It might be the time we live in. So all the generations following must have the feeling that it's now because it will be short.

Remember Jacob talking to the Pharaoh in the first meeting, and the Pharaoh of Egypt just looking at an old man and he must have asked, "Tell us something about yourself. Who are you?" And he said, "You know, I lived only a few days." That's what he said. He was actually 130 years old and Jacob said unto Pharaoh, "All the days of the years of my pilgrimage are 130 years. Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been and have not obtained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." You see, he was a pilgrim. He wasn't home on earth. It was not his home,

not his final destination. Few and evil. Pilgrimage. He was waiting for that salvation of the Lord.

You know Psalm 90, don't you? "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told." What does that mean, a tale that is told? A word that is spoken, a tale is a word. Told, is spoken. A sigh of a sigh. You know, when I say a word, the word "word," when I say the word "word," how long does it take, how long is it in the air? Word. It's so brief, such a short moment. Our life is a tale that is told.

"For we are strangers before thee and sojourners as were our fathers, our days on earth are as a shadow and there is none abiding." You know, we have the feeling, don't we, I am not going to die young. I may get to 100. You know, I caught myself this week as well, I thought maybe another 20 years of children. I'm 87 so that's why not? It's absolutely not realistic, is it? And still it's in my mind sometimes, that feeling invincible, that feeling that I'm not going to die yet, and yet you may have that same feeling that you are so focused on a long life, you're kind of almost counting on it. Well, that's so wrong because it's like a shadow, it's like a tale that is told. We have to live with death every day. It can be just around the corner.

Count your days. The time is short. It's like a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. You know, when your mother has a pan of water on the stove and you just see the steam coming off, that steam is just there and just disappears. That's what life is. Our days are as a handbreath and I understand that the Reverend often said a handbreath not this way but this way. That's not very wide so that is a short time and we have to realize that.

And not only that but also the Second Coming of Christ will be shortly. Beloved, be not ignorant over that one thing because during the time of the Apostle Peter people just challenging that and said, "You know, whatever. Things haven't changed much the last couple years. I don't think it is that fast." But he says, "Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousands years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some count slackness, but is longsuffering to uswards, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. The day of the Lord is as a thief in the night in which the heavens shall pass away with great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." You know, do you have an old piece of garment, a shirt, a coat, that you have been wearing for years and years in the garden or something and there are holes and stains and it's worn? That's this world. This world is worn. This world is an old man. This world has wrinkles and it's limping and it's sick and it's about to die. This world is. It's not only the environment, it's not only that people change the environment and may have misused this world, although we have responsibilities, it's also God's hand. You just notice it, it's like a garment that gets old.

So therefore, "I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none." So are you married? That's fine, it's a blessing, but you should live as if you're not. What do you mean? Ignore her? No. Don't do that. Just be unfaithful? Of course that's not the meaning either. But you're married and yet she is

not your idol. She is not, he is not your everything. You just moderate it. You just realize it's only for the time being. You realize one of us is first. You realize I have nothing to say. You realize that your marriage is not the marriage. The marriage is the marriage of the Lord with his people. The marriage is the Lord Jesus Christ being the bridegroom and I belong to the bride. That's the real marriage. That's the real relationship. That's the real love. That's the real peace. That's the real thing. So if that's on your mind, if the Lord Jesus is on your mind, the Savior who gave his life for the bride, lay down his life for his church, if he is your focal point, then your marriage is not the same anymore.

"And they that weep, as though they wept not." Who is weeping here? Who is suffering here? You know, I can see that, maybe you're also overwhelmed with sadness about things and you cry maybe every day about something and the Lord says, "Weep, that's okay, as though they wept not. Don't let the sadness overwhelm you. Don't let the concerns in this life kill you. Just let go. Ye that are called by the Lord, take things a little easier and give it over in the hands of God. Ye that are called, the time is short, it won't be forever so you don't have to feel sad in such an overwhelming way." Because sadness, if you are too sad, can be a sin, right?

"And they that buy, as though they possessed not." Remember, young man, the first car you bought? A new car, a new truck? You were thinking and thinking, "Well, which one would I use and can I afford this?" And you're thinking about it hours and hours, and then you brought your first car home and, you know, you're so careful, you were just polishing it every weekend, vacuum cleaning and then the first scratch, right, the first little dent and you're so upset. Whatever. You know, I can see the point, I remember it myself as well, but you have to just let those things go.

"They that buy as though they possessed not." So it's only earthly possession. It is not forever and I skip down, "and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not." You can also be overly happy, so happy with things that it's not normal anymore, not God-fearing because there should be one happiness, the one happiness we have heard about in verse 24, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." Therein abide with God. He's talking about them that are called and says, "Abide, let every man wherein he is called, abide with God." It is with God. You rejoice with God. Sad with God. Married with God. Single with God.

"They that buy, as though they possessed not." We talked about that car but, you know, what about people shopping, shopping and they don't even know what they're shopping for? They don't need anything but they just go shopping, just look at things and buying things if they may think that they find something that they need, just getting a kick from that, the thrill of that. Just buying, buying always gives something of an excitement, right? You buy something and you bring it home and it often doesn't take long and it wears off again.

So the Apostle Paul says, "The time is short so take my advice and calm down. And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." I don't think that "fashion" is the same as our word fashion, but you know, why do we have



fashion? Why do models of cars change over time? Why is the fashion in clothing changing all the time? One, this is fashion, the other one is fashion, and Europe is even worse. Why is that? To sell more, so people get excited again and say, "I have to have that." You know, those things are more sinful than you think. We talk about a few things with the children, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong. Right, what about this? What do they see in your life? What do they see in your behavior? In your selling and buying and enjoying things? Do they see it? "My mom says you can't do this and this and this but she enjoys life so much. It's everything to her." Doesn't make sense, does it? Do our children see it that we possess as if we possessed not, and buy as buy not, and rejoice and rejoice not, and weep as though we wept not? That's a strong message, right?

So people of God, what we need is to kind of disconnect already a little bit. Don't have your roots so deep. Be a pilgrim here below. Consider what it will be to meet the bridegroom. Consider what it will be to be with him forever and ever, that he will wipe away all the tears from our eyes. Don't get so excited about things and be careful, sometimes you have so much zeal and so little light. Also, speak of those things with others. And unconverted ones, how much time has been wasted? How many futile things you have been busy with, things that were not important at all and you just gave your life to those things, your time? How much time have you used for sinful things, even? Precious time the Lord has given you to be saved, for you to seek him and you said, "I'm not going to seek the Lord. I'm going to sin with this hour. I take this hour for my own pleasure and I do what I want."

The time is short so God granted you time to be saved and don't use your time to perish. Have you wasted your best time, the time of your youth? Have you wasted your time? What do you think sinners in hell think about? Sinners in hell think about, "If I could attend a service again, I would listen. If I could read the Bible again, I think I would do my utmost to understand it. If I had a year on earth, or a month, or a week, or a day." You know, people in hell, they realize that the time was short and that they had not paid attention to that. They just have lived for their own selves.

So think about it, the fire will not be quenched, the worm not die. Remember the times that we were together in church. Today if you hear his voice, harden not your heart. And I have a question for the boys and girls: do you think that the Lord, the Creator of the universe, do you think that he is calling you? Yes or no? Is he calling you? Well, he is. He calls you, "My son, my daughter, give me your heart." And we know there is an Almighty God with his Holy Spirit and he's able to call also in such a way that people cannot resist anymore and don't want to resist anymore. They have been called into that marvelous light. Paul's advice to them that are called. The apostle's advice to abide, four times in this chapter, abide, abide, abide, abide because the time is short. Amen.